

# Bill Fromhold

State Representative

49th District

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## CAPITAL LETTER:

A report about  
your Legislature

**Leadership:**

Assistant Democratic Whip

**Committees:**

Second Vice Chair, Appropriations

Vice Chair, Higher Education

Member,

Trade & Economic Development

**Dear Fellow Citizen:**

**Thank you for your interest in our Washington State Legislature.**

**When you get down to it, our system of government has a pretty uncomplicated foundation. It's all about communication.** People you send to the House of Representatives and the Senate have a duty to stay in touch with our communities and neighborhoods. That's why we distribute newsletters, and schedule Town Halls, District Days, and the like.

A few weeks ago, we concluded work on rewriting the operating budget, on resolving the transportation quandary, and on reconciling other pressing issues. We wrapped up our business on time – in exactly the 60 days assigned by our Washington Constitution. I'm proud that we steered the budget back into balance with no general tax increase – and without going overtime. I'll talk at greater length later about what we did to mend the frayed budget, and about additional matters as well.

**Once again, I ask that *you* stay in touch.** Ann Tjersland, my assistant, and I always welcome your comments.

Respectfully,

**Bill Fromhold**  
State Representative  
49<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

I know you've heard the bittersweet news that Representative Val Ogden has decided not to seek re-election.

It's bitter news for our district and state – but sweet for her husband, children, and grandkids. In her years in office, Representative Ogden has dedicated herself to the fair and right thing for our 49<sup>th</sup> District, and for our state as a whole. She will be sorely missed in legislative discussions. Thank you for everything, Val!

Spring 2002

# Representative Bill Fromhold

## New state budget: An epic challenge requires standing up to some hard choices

Storms, thank goodness, don't blow through our state much more "imperfect" than what we've encountered the last year or so.

The worst recession in 20 years, for one thing. A relentless energy crisis, for another – and then the continuing drought. A slumping high-tech industry, and the economic "aftershocks" of the earthquake. A higher-than-expected school enrollment, the larger prison population, and a significantly bigger price tag for health care. Thanks to these costly squalls, the recession that started before the tragic terrorism last September has only grown worse ever since.

### A reasonable answer

We had 60 days to rewrite our state budget and provide a reasonable answer to a very unreasonable economic puzzle. Our responsibility was to bridge the chasm – the huge gap between programs and services in the budget, and revenue available to pay for them.

The hole deepened from about \$1.2 billion when the Legislature convened in January to \$1.5 billion not much more than a month later.

Keep in mind that we're about halfway through the current biennium, which started July 1, 2001, and runs through June 30, 2003. So, we had about half the operating budget to tap in making hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts. Further, the Legislature was duty-bound to honor our state's constitutional imperative to fully fund our schools.

### On time, no tax hike

But balance the state budget we did. On time. With no hike in general taxes.

**We found agreement on a largely bipartisan compromise to anchor the balance.** On top of the significant cuts which amount to \$700 million, this new budget is built on the combination of a freeze on state-employee salaries, the laying off of more than 900 state workers, the availability of tobacco-settlement money, and the use of emergency reserves.

One of my colleagues, a legislator who represents part of Snohomish County, called this new strategy a good budget for bad times.

## Transportation plan: Compromise means finding a middle way between two extremes

The very first important bill approved this year — on just the fifth day of session, no less! — was our efficiency and accountability plan for transportation.

Quickly signed into law by the governor, this legislation represents a big, bipartisan step toward real reform in the way we maintain and improve our transportation infrastructure. The new policy calls for genuine efficiency – and genuine accountability. **Specifically, we adopted key recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation – a panel made up of private citizens and businesspeople that invested two years searching for ways to move our roads, highways, bridges, ferries, and other parts of the infrastructure into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

The bill authorizes more contracting-out for design and construction of transportation projects. I call this provision a new emphasis on developing and strengthening partnerships with our private sector.

Now, note a definition for the word "compromise" that I used to start off this section.

Compromise pretty well defines the significant chapter we wrote in answer to the overall transportation challenge.

Specific projects proposed for Vancouver and Clark County include:

- An interchange for Interstate 5 at 134<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Widening for Interstate 205/State Route 14 to 83<sup>rd</sup> Street.



# CAPITAL LETTER: A report about your Legislature

- **A Mill Plain Boulevard exit for State Route 205 (the 112<sup>th</sup> Street connector).**
- **New interchanges and additional lanes for State Route 500.**
- **Additional lanes for Interstate 5 from Salmon Creek to Interstate 205.**
- **Work on a replacement Interstate 5 bridge.**

The 10-year, \$7.7 billion statewide transportation proposal we passed aims to improve highway safety and efficiency. A nine-cent increase in the state gas tax — five cents starting next January and four cents the following year — would provide most of the revenue. A 30-percent increase in the gross vehicle-weight fee — half next January and half the following year — and a one-percent sales-tax increase on vehicles starting next January would provide the rest of the revenue.

I won't say more about this specific transportation-revenue package because you and other Washington voters will make the final decision on it this November.

*(Note: I've limited my newsletter to these relatively few lines on the transportation-project and funding package. That's because our state's ethics law bars the use of public resources — such as newsletters — to discuss candidates and ballot issues at much specific length. I'll tell you more in person, on the phone, or in community meetings. The ethics law allows legislators to answer specific inquiries in these types of situations.)*

## Economic development: Job-creation, protection for the environment are emphasized

**We can do the right thing for our economy — and for our environment.**

Maybe these days more than ever, we've got to emphasize quality development to attract healthy, good-paying jobs for our working families. And just as important today as ever, we've got to protect and preserve our quality of life for ourselves and future generations.

Aimed at attracting jobs and assuring environmental protection for Clark County and other Washington

regions, I won support for industrial-land-bank legislation this year. Terms of the plan give Vancouver and other selected cities a sense of certainty in planning for land banks. **There is good potential for our cities and counties to attract and keep smart growth and good-paying jobs.**

Representatives from Clark County and southwestern Washington cities testified for my legislation, and I talked with our county officials to see their priorities before we put this bill together. Businesses and environmental groups were also consulted in the development of this bipartisan bill, which I call a cornerstone to attract high-quality jobs — and a promise to ensure protection of our environment.

In the House of Representatives, I also sponsored our version of a new policy seeking to avoid needless court action over disagreements about construction problems. To me, it just makes common sense that a contractor should at least have a chance to fix a problem *before* a lawsuit is filed!

A great many additional new courses were set toward economic development this year. The Legislature:

- **Established a permanent, reliable source of funding for the Community Economic Revitalization Board — a program that works to strengthen our infrastructure and attract high-quality new businesses.**
- **Reformed the unemployment-insurance program to ensure equity for employers — and at the same time, manage growth and maintain appropriate benefits for eligible, unemployed citizens.**
- **Streamlined the permit process so an individual or business wanting to do a job isn't snowed in by a blizzard of paperwork.**
- **Authorized community-revitalization-project financing for local communities.**
- **Fostered community-renewal projects for depressed regions to create — and keep — good jobs for low-income citizens.**
- **Rewrote the civil-service system to promote more contracting out — which means the system will rely much more heavily on partnerships with private businesses and companies.**
- **Encouraged product-development through implementation of a tax exemption for research firms.**

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### Capital projects: Stimulus package also seeks growth in our high-quality jobs

**I mentioned above that economic development is probably more important now than ever – and the stimulus package in this year's new capital budget is another good example.**

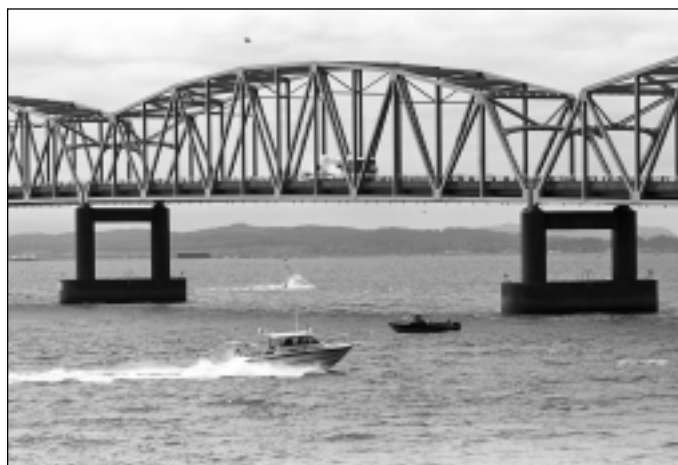
We need these projects both to cultivate business-development and to foster the kind of business climate that grows good-paying jobs. The legislation includes statewide funding for needed projects such as local jails, salmon-recovery efforts, and water-pollution control.

Some of the specific endeavors planned for our southwestern Washington region include:

- **Design work on the Washington State Patrol Vancouver crime lab.**
- **Facility-repairs and structural work for Clark College.**
- **Storage-expansion and hazardous-materials work for the Fish & Wildlife facility in our area.**

Further, the capital budget features state money to help pay for dredging the Columbia River between Vancouver and the Pacific Ocean.

This project, which is headed up by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is absolutely crucial for our regional economy. Washington is more involved in international trade than any other state in the nation – no one is as close to Pacific Rim trading partners as we are! **By making sure the Columbia is as navigable as possible, we'll keep Vancouver and other Washington ports along the river at the top of these trade standings.**



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